

Channeling the qualitative research PedaGoddess: Three exercises for instructors

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Over the last 15 years, I have been teaching qualitative research methods to graduate students in a way that is accessible, equitable, and yet maintaining the complexity of qualitative research. While I have many pedagogical activities listed in my text (Bhattacharya, 2017), I am listing three activities here that might be helpful for educators who are teaching qualitative research.

1. **The Mystery Box Activity** – This activity is usually helpful at the beginning of teaching in qualitative, quantitative, and introduction to research classes. Add things inside an opaque box that may or may not make sounds when rattled, such as paperclips, paper, stones, pencils, etc. Seal the box tightly so there is no way to see what is inside the box. Make multiple boxes that could be distributed to students as a group activity. Now ask the students to examine the box any way they like without opening the box and create a report on the box, that includes the content of the box, to the best of their abilities. The students usually rattle the box to figure out what is in the box and make a report of it. Once they are done, discuss how the students arrived at their conclusions to create their reports and what they perceived as barriers and unknown information. Facilitate the discussion to illuminate how the research process contains many pieces of information that remain unknown to the researcher. For example, if something did not rattle against the box like a piece of paper or a cotton ball, it doesn't mean that there was an absence of information there. This is also a good way to talk about silences in data and how they might not indicate absence of information. There might be some students who would want the closure to verify the accuracy of their report on their boxes. By not providing them with a finite answer also leads to the question of messiness and the role of the unknown in research.
2. **Subjectivity Performances** – Often when students meet qualitative research for the first time, they experience a lexicon bludgeoning of new and abstract terms that take time to fully internalize. Given that students have to learn how they position themselves within their inquiry and its influences on the inquiry itself, it might be helpful to allow multiple forms of expression of one's subjectivities. I have asked students to represent their subjectivities in any creative form they would like, including the traditional form of writing an essay. However, I have invited them to take some risks and perhaps create a photo essay, a poem, a song, a dance, or anything else they would like. I have found that students demonstrate a freedom of expression from which they derive a clarity of thought about their positionality.

Students have presented dances, spoken word poems, artwork, mimes, board games, short videos, and stories told through objects. This activity alone creates community in the classroom and people realize that even though they might have varied histories, they are also interconnected in some way. They understand social structures and how they produce people's experiences from bearing witness to their peers' storied lives. This activity enhances the ways in which students humanize each other and develop an awareness of lived experiences and subjectivities in ways that they might have not been aware of previously. Allow generous time to discuss with the group how they received each subjectivity performance. I have had to hold two class meetings to create an immersive experience. Prompts such as, "What stood out to you?" or "What surprised you?" or "What was strongly reinforced for you?" have been generative in facilitating discussion. If possible, these discussions can also be mapped onto various paradigms such as interpretivism, critical theories, deconstructivism, and more.

3. **Flip the Script on Balinese Cockfight** – One of the most common pieces of readings assigned in many qualitative research classes is *Deep Play: Notes on Balinese Cockfight* by Geertz (1973). This piece demonstrates deep, rich, thick descriptive writing and is a good exemplar of interpretive qualitative research. However, it is also an example of the white gaze as a cultural outsider to the Balinese people. Once we read the piece, our class activity is to flip the script and consider what ritualistic activities might we engage in the western world that would appear awry to a cultural outsider. In doing this activity, we first unpack how we understand culture. Then we start to list various ritualized activities in the United States, where I teach. We talk about tailgating culture, football culture, cheerleading culture, soccer mom culture, and much more. And we use a cultural outsider lens, similar to the main character in the TV show, *Third Rock from the Moon*, or someone from a non-western background to outline the things that seem unfamiliar and strange. In doing so, we open up discussions about exoticization, the consequence of the surveillance that comes from an ethnographic gaze, and knowledge construction without unpacking the embedded whiteness. Putting ourselves under such gaze automatically creates fertile, generative, critical, and expansive conversation focusing on the ethical obligations of researchers when they are cultural outsiders.

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